

PHILLIPS SAYS ROADS ARE BIGGEST PROBLEM

Richmond Banker Declares Highway Department's Overhead Cost Is 7 Per Cent.

AGAINST PIECEMEAL WORK

Believes Roads Should Be Started From Somewhere and Completed. Improved Highways Important for Business.

In the opinion of H. N. Phillips, president of the Broadway National Bank, of Richmond, and chairman of the Third District Roads Committee of the Virginia Bankers' Association, the State Highway Department of Virginia is operating at an overhead cost of 7 per cent of the money expended, and this he believes to be a very reasonable cost. Mr. Phillips, in an address before the Virginia Good Roads Association in Roanoke, disapproved the Department's plan of building a stretch of road here and a stretch there throughout the State. He said he believed a road should be built from somewhere to a given point. His address follows:

I especially appreciate the opportunity of appearing before you today, for this is by far the largest, most representative and able body of men that I have yet seen gathered in Virginia to consider the matter of good roads. And I congratulate you, Mr. President, upon the wonderful enthusiasm you have aroused in the people of Virginia upon this subject.

But in coming before this body I feel very much like the preacher at a Methodist revival who finds the amen corners filled with the elect brethren and no sinners in the crowd to be prayed for. The very fact that you are here is evidence enough that you are interested in good roads and already informed as to our needs. If we could just get these meetings out among the backwoods men we might be able to tell them a few things, for strange as it may seem, those people in the remote and undeveloped districts who should be most benefited by good roads are the least interested, the least informed and the greatest objectors, but their vote counts just as much on election day as that of the Governor of the State or the judge of your court. I therefore earnestly hope, Mr. President, you may be provided with the ways and means for carrying your moving-picture machine and other informative propaganda into every corner of the State and arousing people to their needs and show them the way to obtain them.

But you have asked me to direct my remarks particularly to the thought of "Good Roads in Relation to Business." If this is not a business proposition we are wasting our time here today. But it is a business proposition, strictly business and worthy of the most careful thought of the best minds in our State, and I have no doubt you are giving it that consideration.

Road Problem Is Biggest.

The problem of good roads is one of our biggest and probably calls for the expenditure of more money than any other one thing, our public schools excepted. It takes millions, and we are going to spend millions. Therefore, it should be strictly business right from the top, the office of the highway commission. That office should be conducted in the most business-like and economical manner. We presume it is. Unnecessary salaries and expenses should be topped off there where the public's funds are being spent as quickly as if it were a private enterprise. Overhead expenditure is necessarily large. Many think it much larger than it is. Believing these expenses excessive, and having only a vague indefinite knowledge of what they are for many are critical, some very critical. Care should be taken to give to the people in some way a plain business-like statement of the reasonableness of those expenses if they are reasonable, and thereby remove one large obstacle to creating sentiment among the masses in favor of the good roads program. If there is extravagance or unwise and preferential use of funds, the public who put up these funds have a right to know that, and this association which is, or should be, the mouthpiece of the people and not the servant of the commission, should bring such matters plainly to the attention of those responsible for them, and with full force of its large membership and public sentiment behind it, bring about a correction.

While I have not been able to get just the information in the way of figures that I wished to bring you, I submit the following for your consideration: I asked for information as to the source of our good roads funds and for some details as to the expenditure of the same. As to the sources I find that we received from auto taxes and licenses \$1,750,000,

from the one-mill tax, \$1,375,000. General appropriation from the State, \$504,000; convict labor, \$300,000; Federal aid, \$2,000,000; making a total of \$5,829,000. Some of the items, however, cover a two-year period and could not well be separated. The approximate amount for the year ending October 31, 1920, however, was about \$4,000,000. As to expenditures I asked for the following: first, for salaries of officials, members of commissions, clerks, stenographers and traveling expenses of same.

Second, amount expended for salaries of engineers, draftsmen, surveyors and other costs of preliminary work.

Third, amount expended for stationery, postage, printing, advertising, office rent and equipment.

Fourth, amount expended as direct payment for actual work in repairing roads.

Fifth, amount expended directly in building new roads.

To the first three questions I could not get separate answers, but found that the amount allowed for salaries and expenses for the five men constituting the highway commission was only \$11,000 per annum. If the men composing this board are not worth \$11,000 per year they should be at once dismissed and other appointments made, for the work devolving upon them is of so great importance that \$11,000 is a small sum to pay if the duties are well performed. I find that the appropriation to cover salaries and other things included in the first question is \$30,600 per annum. A large sum, but when you remember that this is the total overhead expenses on the sum expended it resolves itself into an overhead charge of only about 7 per cent, which is considered very modest cost in most business enterprises.

Repairs and New Work.

I find that for repair work the total expenditure was \$1,600,000; for new road building, \$2,700,000. I could not ascertain the number of miles of road repaired nor the number of miles of new road constructed, but that information, no doubt, you will get from some other source during the convention.

Now let's notice some features of methods pursued in road building, referring, of course, to State highways, not those built with county aid. Not many days ago one of our leading State papers had a most sensible editorial under the heading, "Building Roads by Rods." This matter of building a few miles here and a few miles yonder has long been a point of serious objection on my part and of many others. My criticism may be due to my lack of information as to the reasons why, but I think we are entitled to know the reasons for a course of procedure which is contrary to the judgment of the people at large. There are those here, no doubt, who can give us the controlling reasons from their viewpoint for this method. So far I have heard only one. That one sounds plausible, but I do not believe it is a good one, or founded on fact. It is said that the view obtains in the commission that because every section is clamoring for better roads a little work must be done in all sections or else the people in those sections where work is not being done will raise most strenuous objection, condemn the entire proposition, and by their ballots and through their representatives in the Senate and Legislature perhaps block the whole good roads program.

Gentlemen, I do not at all agree with that idea. I do not think it properly represents the people of Virginia. They are neither so ignorant nor so selfish. They know it must cost more in proportion to do piecemeal work than to do it by large contract, and they certainly want economy. They cannot be selfish as to say that because they cannot at once get all they wish they will not have it at all, nor permit others to have it.

The whole treasury of the State might be opened wide to our highway commissioner, and he could not at once build good roads everywhere that are needed. We must all be patient and let the work progress in orderly, economical and business-like fashion, and to my mind that means longer stretches, larger contracts and fewer of them. One day last week bids were received on twelve projects, the total of which was but little more than the distance from here to Lynchburg. I have no idea where any one of these pieces of road are to be built, but even if every one of them ran into my own home city I would have greatly preferred to see it all in one contract between objectives of some importance, such as Lynchburg and Roanoke, Danville and South Boston, Petersburg and Emporia, Winchester and Leesburg, or some similar points, that is going from somewhere to somewhere in a continuous, completed road, and when the work is undertaken pushed to a speedy finish. The desirability of important objectives is not for the sake of those important places, but because important places are the places to which people wish to go and have to go. It is there they sell the products of their farms, and there they buy their goods and transact all manner of business. It

does but little good to start on a few miles of good road and then have five or ten or thirty miles of mud holes, ruts and chucks over which you can carry only a half a load on slowest time. A few days ago the daily chart of road conditions around Richmond contained the following: Richmond to Charlottesville, fair to Jackson, beyond Jackson impossible. Richmond to Old Point, fair to New Kent, New Kent to Barhamsville impassable, Barhamsville to Williamsburg fair. Williamsburg to Old Point good. Richmond to Goochland, fair to state Farm, impassable beyond. Now, if I need to drive to carry a load to Charlottesville or Williamsburg or Goochland Court-house, what's the good of a few miles of good road or road that is fair if I simply cannot go the rest of the way? Perhaps these objections will be explained by some one here, and if they can show us that under existing conditions it is necessary to proceed in this manner, then it is up to this association to render all assistance possible to the highway commission in having those conditions changed, for while the Virginia Good Roads Association is not in any sense the servant of the commission there should be cordial co-operation between them in whatever tends to the common good, heart and soul with them where we think they are right, so much for business on the inside. Now let's think about the relation of good roads to business on the outside.

Good Roads Benefit Farmers.

Do good roads produce more business and better business? Do they mean more money in the pockets of the people? What do they mean to that greatest of all industries upon which we all depend, agriculture? In my judgment no class of men would be so much benefited as the great host of honest farmers. I say honest farmers advisedly, for farmers tell me all the crooks go to town and honest men live in the country. Maybe so. But how does he profit by good roads? He can produce larger and better crops. Where it would require four horses to haul a given load to market over bad roads two will take it over a good one and the other two can be plowing in oats, laying by corn or breaking up the watermelon patch. No good farmer ever forgets the watermelon patch. If he does his hauling by truck, over the good road, he can do it in one-third of the time and with half the gasoline and oil. Isn't that money in his pocket? Furthermore, when the market is right he can take his goods in and sell them at top prices. He doesn't have to wait until next week for the roads to dry out, by which time the market has dropped. He gets the best price while the fellow on the mud road waits and has to take what he can get. His truck or wagon and harness will last him twice as long, and they cost money. Big saving then to have good roads. But I hear some of my brother farmers say yes, I can't deny these things, they are true, but the taxes, taxes, taxes. If there is one thing a farmer does hate, it is taxes. But wait a minute now, brother farmer. Did you ever think just where these State roads are built? Did you? In the country, every mile of them. Not a foot of them in the city, but we poor fellows who live in the city pay more taxes to build roads in the country than all the country people combined. Did you ever think of that? Did you know it? Did you know that of every dollar spent on building country roads the country people pay only 17 cents? Pretty good bargain I think when you can get a dollar's worth of work done for 17 cents, 6 to 1. And did you ever figure out just what your road tax really was? It is put in your tax returns as the one-mill road tax. We'll say you own a farm worth \$10,000. Country folks are pretty good at handling the assessors, and that farm is probably assessed at \$3,000, and your road tax on a \$10,000 farm would be just \$3—not enough to pay for "busting" one pair of hames straining out of some old mud hole.

Good roads, too, mean improved social conditions. Public intercourse and visitation between families become easier and more frequent. What tends to make life in the country more pleasant tends to keep more young men on the farms. That means more production, more business and better business. Far too many now are leaving the country as producer and coming to the cities where they become consumers, and nine out of ten are sadly disappointed when they find out what city life really means to them and the glamour of it all has vanished. Ten miles to town or city over good roads means nothing. You can hop into your little roadster and be there before I can walk three or four blocks and catch a crowded street car and stand up all the way to my place of business. And if Joe wants to take his best girl to the movies, they can be waiting in line when I arrive. In other words, with good roads you have all the advantages in business and in pleasure of both city and country.

Changing Horace Greeley's slogan of long ago, "Young man, go West," I would say to the young men of the country, "Young man, stay at home," that is if you have sense enough to be a farmer. If you haven't, then

perhaps it's all right for you to go to the city where you can earn a living under a boss at so much a day, and at the end of the year have little left but recollections. This will apply to the country merchant, lawyer and doctor, as well as to the farmer boy.

But we must be fair. All the benefits of good roads are not to the country dweller. They of the city receive great benefits too. No city can grow or prosper which is difficult of access from the surrounding country. It's business will languish and die. They must have the countryman's trade if they would thrive. If his roads are such that he cannot come, how can he buy and sell? The markets must be supplied by him and the dry goods man, the clothier, shoe dealer and the hardware store must sell to him. If by reason of good roads he becomes a more prosperous farmer, he becomes a large buyer, and a better depositor in your city banks. I have no doubt that some of the very best, most desirable accounts in the great banks of this fine city are farmers' accounts.

The very sustenance of our bodies and the profits in our business depend upon the ability of the people of the country to get to us and our ability to get to them. Strange as it may seem, the good road is a two-edged sword, but with kindly edges, for while it increases profit to the producer it decreases cost to the consumer, for if the farmer can produce and market larger crops at less cost, he can sell cheaper and still be ahead of the game, and business is better at both ends of the road. The cities, therefore, should, and I think do, very cheerfully pay their large share of the taxes for building good roads in the country. But it is not entirely a matter of dollars and cents with the city dweller any more than it is with those who reside in the country. It has its social side for us too. Most of the people living in cities come from the country or are just one or two generations removed, and we love that host of wholesome, happy country cousins, and we love to visit you, especially on a hot summer day when the watermelons are ripe and we can sit with you under the shade in the big back yard with a whole half of it stretched across our knees and talk about the crops and about what's going on in town. And we'd like to sit around your fire-side at night and smoke and talk, and reminisce a little about old times when we were boys together and ran barefoot in the early morning frost to our rabbit traps and sold the skins to buy our sweethearts a Christmas present. Maybe none of you ever did that sort of thing. Well, you missed a lot if you didn't. More intercourse and intimate friendly relations between city and country mean more business and better business for both. Good roads will bring it about.

Shipping by Truck Experiment.

In recent months much has been said and some experiments have been made on shipping by truck. This perhaps will never amount to much, and should not except in cases of emergency, for water and rail are natural and logical means of transportation for long hauls. But several times in recent years labor unions have threatened a complete tie-up of all transportation lines in the United States. Happily, it never came. But each of us here passed many days in dread and fear that it would come. A fearful calamity to overtake any land. Whether such a strike were just or unjust the results would have been the same—staggering, stupendous losses to everybody, and if prolonged, suffering and starvation to thousands, and that in the midst of abundance, but that abundance unavailable—for lack of transportation the farmer losing his perishable products and the cities dying for need of them. Few cities have within their corporate bounds food enough for more than a week. But if good highways interlaced our land every wheel on every railroad might cease to turn and none would go hungry for a long, long time. The farmer would load his wagons and trucks and bring his produce from near and far, knowing that a rare price awaited him, and the city would gladly pay, for food must be had. In such an emergency good roads would save for the nation millions upon millions of dollars beyond their cost, and such an emergency, gentlemen, is by no means impossible. Let us be prepared. Agitation and discontent breed such conditions. Unemployment breeds agitation and discontent. There is much unemployment today and more is likely. Let us heed the situation. A comprehensive road-building program calls for much labor, and wherever possible labor should now be employed at reduced, but reasonable wages. Let us take a leaf from the book of that once great, but now unhappy land far beyond the seas, a land no longer great but in the vastness of her territory; no longer rich but in memories; no longer productive save in the most awful crimes and evils in the annals of time; no longer wise save in her dead and banished—Russia. Even she, long years ago, in order to quiet unrest and fill the hungry mouths of idle hosts, built her wonderful crystal palace, a thing of ice, to melt and

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